



AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Masaryk Memorial Statue Repair Completed Major Landscaping Urgently Needed



Repairs to the Masaryk Memorial statue in Washington, D.C., were made by the Kreilick Conservation Company.

(Photos by Phil Kasik)

Since 2002, a memorial to Czechoslovak President and Liberator Tomáš G. Masaryk has stood tall in Washington, D.C., a symbol of the longstanding and enduring relationship between the U.S. and the Czech Republic. This memorial and the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague together honor the U.S. and Czech leaders who were key to the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

Like many in Washington, the iconic statue of Masaryk, the centerpiece of the memorial, needed some significant structural repair, specifically with its anchors to its pedestal. AFoCR Executive Vice President Phil Kasik personally spearheaded the project and retained professional conservation specialists who completed the needed work in October 2016. They accomplished their goal of minimizing the likelihood of similar issues in the future.

Unfortunately, the project's cost far exceeded the available funds, and more work remains to be done to replace trees and shrubbery that have not stood up to the challenging Washington weather and vehicular traffic at this busy location. Mr. Kasik therefore is planning a project to replace most of the landscaping. AFoCR will be consulting with National Park Service experts to ensure that replacement plants and trees are more suited to the conditions. That will cost a substantial amount, double or even triple the normal annual site maintenance budget.

A Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs cultural grant together with generous donations from the Bohemian Citizens Benevolent Society of Astoria and the estate of Jaroslav Strižka, covered about half of the repair. Because the actual repair cost far exceeded the grant and contributions and re-landscaping can no longer be delayed, AFoCR is now faced with a fundraising effort to raise \$20,000 to cover the balance of the repair and fund the re-landscaping effort.

Donations for this project can be sent to AFoCR at 4410 Massachusetts Ave., NW, #391, Washington, DC 20016-5572 or made on-line at www.afocr.org.

AFoCR Sponsors Visit by Congressional Delegation to the Czech Republic



Representative Janice Schakowsky Holds Panel Discussion at the Václav Havel Library in Prague (Photo by David Musil)

In September 2016 AFoCR and the Chicago Czech Center (“CCC”) co-sponsored a robust five-day visit to Prague by U.S. Representative Janice Schakowsky of Illinois (9th District), co-chair of the Congressional Czech Caucus. The purpose of the Congressional Delegation trip (“CODEL”) was to enrich the congresswoman’s knowledge of Czech politics, history, culture, civil society, and other topics significant to Czech-U.S. relations and to Central Europe as a whole. Accompanied by her husband, Robert Creamer, she met with governmental officials, business and community leaders, and journalists, and was hosted at receptions by both U.S. Ambassador Andrew Schapiro and Lady Mayor of Prague Adriana Krnáčová.

Traveling from Chicago with Rep. Schakowsky were AFoCR Directors Kristyna Pellouchoud Driehaus and George Drost and AFoCR Advisor John Pellouchoud. These three, along with Prague-based AFoCR Advisor Magdalena Vošalíková, escorted her on her visits. Essential to the planning and organization on the U.S. side was AFoCR Director Patty Stack. Ms. Driehaus, the Project Manager of the CODEL, is also the founder and Chair of CCC, and Mr. Pellouchoud is a CCC Director.

Rep. Schakowsky characterized the CODEL as “a listening tour,” and she was not disappointed. A wide range of experts and leaders from various fields provided a comprehensive view of the Czech Republic and its issues. She began by participating in a panel discussion at the Václav Havel Library moderated by former Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Žantovský. The event, co-organized with Aspen Institute Prague and attended by 60 guests, covered topics ranging from the U.S. elections, the UK Brexit, and the importance of unity and alliances. She discussed foreign affairs with Deputy Foreign Minister Václav Kolaja and social issues with Human Rights Minister Jiří Deinstbeir.

Her packed schedule included meetings with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalists; Czech media and non-profit leaders; the think-tank European Values, which is led by former Ambassador to the U.S. Petr Kolář; and GISTIn Up, a company team focusing on new startup projects. She also met with leaders of women's organization, with a lively discussion about women's position in Czech society.

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Letter from AFoCR President Tom Dine

DEMOCRACY DECLINES WHILE RUSSIA INCLINES



Powerful negative political currents are circulating in Central Europe, and liberal democracy is in trouble. Radical populism stressing ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, and autocracy is rising in key countries. At the same time, Russia is aggressively undermining democratic societies and their values and institutions. The anti-democratic forces of militant populism and the Kremlin are more and more in tandem, producing what is now commonly known as "illiberality."

In the United States, concerns about the strength of democracy abound. Strident populism, including ethno-nationalism and racism, threatens democratic norms. Our just-concluded presidential election did not ensure compromise or the end of anti-governmental positioning.

In Europe, the great wave of democratization at the end of the Cold War has crested, if not eroded. Europe now experiences an undertow of dashed economic expectations and self-indulgence among leaders; dishonesty and fraud are becoming widespread.

The fate of today's political fortunes is increasingly defined by political action of aggrieved ordinary people. Surging populist parties control parliamentary majorities or pluralities in six European countries (Greece, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and share in government in three others (Finland, Lithuania, and Norway).

So far the Czech Republic, with some irregularities including President Miloš Zeman, remains the only bright star -- functional democratic government, free media, active civil society, an economy of growth, and comity in its Parliament. According to the Washington-based Freedom House, the Czech's "democracy score" has improved over the last 10-years, unlike the rest of the region.

In this fading system, political populism is becoming popular. Marine Le Pen of France's National Front recently said, "There is a form of revolt on the part of the people against a system that is no longer serving them." She is the leading candidate in France's 2017 presidential election. Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump declared similar sentiments during America's 2016 elections.

Why the growing suspicion of and hostility toward elites, as well as toward mainstream politics and established institutions? Reasons include corruption by officials in government, governing gridlock, and economic stagnation among the bottom 99 percent, as well as a deepening political and social chasm between the very rich and the poor, with the shrinking middle losing economically and feeling forgotten.

Illiberalism, like black mold, has crept inside the democratic house, in the form of ultra-nationalism, neo-populist political parties, demagogic political figures, and policies of prejudice toward minorities. This year, an "Austria first" candidate for president, Norbert Hofer, explained to his opponent, "You have the

haute volée (high society) behind you; I have the people with me." Hofer lost, but the score sounds familiar here in the U.S.

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán leads the continent in flouting democratic norms. Once an enthusiastic, practicing democrat, he today is described as "Hungary's autocratically inclined prime minister." Both the governing and the largest opposition parties are populist. Orbán seeks to transform his country into "an illiberal new state based on national foundations," in which the government marginalizes opposition by weakening institutions such as the courts and the media. Orbán has created largely autonomous governing bodies packed with his loyalists.

This autumn, Orbán had the country's leading opposition newspaper suspended and its website closed down, with more than 50 journalists locked out of their email accounts, in retaliation for its reporting exposes about government corruption. The state television channels and news agency have become propaganda instruments. Orbán publicly displays friendliness toward Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Orbánism is being exported to Poland, inspiring politicians such as former prime minister Jarosław Kaczyński. He has warned that migrants from the Middle East could bring about a dissolution of the country's Christianity.

A close second to Orbán in diminishing liberal democracy in Europe is Turkey, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His democratic critics in Turkey call his political behavior, "Putinism with a Turkish face." Erdoğan is suppressing dissent in the media and judicial independence. The country is becoming more nationalist, autocratic, and anti-western.

To make matters worse, throughout the continent, Russian fingerprints can be found on efforts to shift liberal democratic institutions and policies into the anti-democratic, authoritarian column.

Russian policies and behavior provoke concerns and outrage in the West. Such high tensions have not been experienced since the Cold War. This began when Russia invaded Georgia in 2008. Tensions rose dramatically with Russia's invasion and occupation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine. They are exacerbated by Russia's anti-humanitarian military behavior in Syria.

Also of serious concern are the Kremlin-approved encroachments along the borders of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and quasi-covert operations of political bribery and disinformation in the Czech Republic and other Visegrad countries. Is Russia preparing for a hot war or are its many recent military activities in and around the homeland ways to spread its influence abroad? Or else to divert the attention of its people from their failing economy?

America's new Trump Administration needs to actively reengage in Central Europe in the months and years ahead, leaving no vacuums. As the chaotic Middle East demonstrates, when the United States sits on the sidelines, others play -- and play hard. The Czech Republic will be even more important in saving and strengthening democracy as a way of life and a way of international relations.

Thomas A. Dine
President, AFoCR

National Day Celebration at Masaryk Memorial Washington, DC - October 27, 2016 (photos by Phil Kasik)



AFoCR Honors Dinner, Washington, DC November 17, 2016 (photos by Lillis Werder)



AFoCR Director Fritz Duda and AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek honored for their work on the Sokol West project; presented by Executive Vice President Phil Kasik



Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič



U.S. Representative Janice Schakowsky of Illinois with AFoCR President Tom Dine

Václav Havel's 80th Birthday Celebration, U.S. Capitol, September 27, 2016

(photos by Phil Kasik)



Congressional Delegation Visit to Prague - Panel Discussion at the Václav Havel Library - Rep. Janice Schakowsky and Michael Žantovský, September 16, 2016

(photos by David Musil)



(Czech Delegation continued from Page 1)

Rep. Schakowsky also took a walking tour of Prague, highlighted by an in depth visit to the Jewish Quarter led by Dr. Robert Řehák, former cultural attaché of the Czech Embassy in Washington, D.C. This was a particularly emotional journey for Rep. Schakowsky, who is Jewish. Hynek Kmoníček, Director of the Foreign Department, Office of the President, welcomed the delegation for a tour of Prague Castle. The city tour ended with Rep. Schakowsky's visit to the Wilson Monument, where she laid flowers in a short ceremony. She remarked that she had fallen in love with Prague.

Important themes from the CODEL included reinforcing western democratic principles, creating trust in government, and reintroducing trusted and independent Western media sources in Central Europe, a void that is currently filled by Russian propaganda.

The CODEL was productive and positive, and Rep. Schakowsky had a number of ideas about cooperation between the Czech Republic and the U.S. AFoCR therefore plans to conduct more CODELs and to hold U.S. Congressional and Czech Parliamentary exchanges and other people-to-people visits.

Václav Havel 80th Birthday Celebrated in Prague, New York, and Washington



Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Speaker Hamáček, and Mrs. Havlová, at 80th Birthday Celebration at U.S. Capitol (Photo by Phil Kasik)

Former President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel, who passed away on December 18, 2011, was born on October 5, 1936. In late September AFoCR officers and directors took part in numerous events in Washington and New York to commemorate his 80th birthday, while ceremonies were held throughout the Czech Republic. The importance of the American events was reflected by the prestigious delegation sent by the Czech government, which included Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Jan Hamáček, former First Lady Dagmar Havlová, Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Karel Schwarzenberg, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Lukáš Kaucký.

The prominence of the Czech delegation was matched by that of the American speakers at a September 27 ceremony held at the bust of Havel in the U.S. Capitol building. They included House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Congressman Joe Barton, Congresswomen Jan Schakowsky and Debbie Dingell, Ambassador Daniel Fried, AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek, and Director Elliot Berke of the Václav Havel Library Foundation.

Other Washington events organized by the Czech Embassy were a staging of Havel's play *Protest* by the Alliance for New Music-Theatre in a sitting room at the Czech Ambassador's residence. This staging recreated the atmosphere of "apartment theater," when publicly banned artists in communist Czechoslovakia used this radical method to share their works with audiences. The play, directed by Susan Galbraith and starring Drew Valins and David Millstone, was repeated the next day at the Woodrow Wilson House and later in New York.

On September 27, Mrs. Havlová, Speaker Hamáček, and Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič attended a performance of poetry and readings from original works by Havel by Georgetown University students, held at Václav Havel's Place at the university. The winner of a student essay competition on the theme of The Salvation of This Human World was announced. The theme was a reflection upon President Havel's speech at a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress in 1990. The winner, student Melina Delkic, received a round-trip air ticket to Prague with a week at a hotel.

Ambassador Gandalovič also held a large reception at the Embassy, which included a photo exhibition of Havel's career by Czech photographer Jiří Jirů and a musical performance by Jaroslav Hutka. On September 29, the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences sponsored a lecture by Havel's brother, Dr. Ivan M. Havel, who spoke about dissents and intellectuals under the communist regime and shared his correspondence with his imprisoned brother.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio declared September 28 as "Václav Havel Day", and numerous events were held there by the Czech Centre in New York and the Václav Havel Library Foundation, including a panel discussion on "The Relevance of President Václav Havel's Legacy in Today's World," moderated by the Atlantic Council and held at the Bohemian National Hall.

In Prague, a small square by the National Theater was named after Havel, and Mrs. Havlová and Culture Minister Daniel Herman unveiled a heart-shaped memorial, a remembrance of the small heart that Havel would draw next to his signature.

All the events on numerous continents evidenced Havel's legacy and his life as an intellectual rebel, lover of women and life, and admirer of rockers and dissidents.

Annual Freedom Lecture



(L) Ambassador Ratislav Kačer, (R) AFoCR Treasurer Barbara Gibian, AFoCR President Tom Dine, with Ambassador Kačer at the Freedom Lecture (Photos by Phil Kasik)

On November 18, 2016, Ambassador Ratislav Kačer delivered the 17th Annual Gibian Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture in Washington, D.C. Currently serving as the Slovak ambassador to Hungary, he is the honorary president of the NGO Bratislava Global Security Forum (GLOBSEC). He has also served as President of the Slovak Atlantic Commission (a member of the Atlantic Treaty Association) and Vice-President of the Atlantic Treaty Association in Brussels. Ambassador Kačer is a well-known expert on transatlantic relations and defense and security issues.

His talk, delivered to a packed house at the prestigious Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, was titled: "U.S. Relations with Central Europe: Love and Reason". He commented on the increasing Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe and speculated on how a Trump presidency might be expected to respond to these threats. AFoCR President Tom Dine presented Ambassador Kačer with a special certification of appreciation.

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*Candles Lit in Memory of
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